



Zero Waste SA

KNOW ALL ABOUT NAPPIES

Fact Sheet

Almost 800 million disposable nappies end up in Australian landfills annually and tackling the estimated 20,000 tonnes generated in South Australia every year is an important way we can reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.

Families can help to reduce landfill by steering away from disposable nappies and using modern cloth nappies for cost saving benefits. In South Australia parents have been encouraged to make the switch with a cloth nappy library that lets you 'try before you buy', and make a potential saving of \$2500 to \$3500 over three years, compared to the ongoing cost of disposable 'single use' nappies.

Once in landfill, the plastics in disposable nappies can take 200 to 500 years to break down.

Organic material (faeces) sent to landfill breaks down and eventually releases methane, a greenhouse gas that is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

The implications for global warming and climate change are enormous.

There are also ongoing impacts from water use, transportation and packaging involved with nappies.

Benefits of using cloth nappies

Save money The cost of using only disposable nappies is about \$3500 to \$4500 per child. The total cost for cloth nappies that can be used over and over again, including liners and laundering, is around \$1000.

Save energy and water The energy, materials and water that go into making disposable nappies which are used once, is far greater than that of reusable nappies.

Save time Modern cloth nappies are easier to use and clean than the old style terry towelling nappies and many styles include reusable or compostable liners. These can be machine washed, have velcro or snaps instead of safety pins, and typically are shaped the same way as disposables, with no need for folding.

Cloth nappies can be used for more than one child. Reusing nappies spreads the cost between children, and even families, if the nappies are passed on.

Try before you buy For a small cost in South Australia you can hire a kit to try different styles of cloth nappies before investing in any purchase. For more information visit: <http://ecobumsclothnappies.com/shop/eco-bums-hire-pack/>

There may be times when it is more convenient to use a disposable nappy. However, by limiting this use you can reduce your household costs and also environmental impact by using cloth nappies most of the time.



Government of South Australia
Zero Waste SA

AVOID • REDUCE • REUSE • RECYCLE

Cloth nappies are better for the environment

A 2009 study by the University of Queensland's School of Environmental Engineering compared the environmental performance of reusable and disposable nappies, taking into consideration water use, energy use and solid waste¹.

The study found that on solid waste alone, reusable nappies are by far the more preferable choice, generating 20 times less solid waste impact than disposables. The study also found that home-washed reusable nappies use less non-renewable and total energy over their life cycle than any other nappy system.



ANIQUE'S STORY

I'm Anique, new mum to Jarrah.

We decided to try cloth nappies while still pregnant. We were excited about the savings and the environmental benefits, not to mention they look great! Particularly in summer when singlets and nappies are the go.

We started our journey into cloth with a local nappy library and worked out what nappies work best for us. We figured out that over a year we would spend approximately \$1000 on disposables and our initial start up for cloth (new and second hand) came to about \$400 – and we only have to pay that once!! Savings start immediately.

The cloth nappies are heaps easy to use - just pop them in the wash, and hang to dry. We get lots of comments on how cute they are! We feel great by helping minimise landfill too!

In relation to water use, there was overlap between home-washed reusables, commercially washed reusables and disposable nappies. However, home-washed nappies that are washed in a front loading machine are the best in terms of water efficiency performance.

On solid waste and energy, home-washed reusable nappies are the clear choice for environmental performance over disposable nappies. If washed efficiently, they are also the lead choice for saving water.

Compostable nappies are another alternative that cost more than 'ordinary' disposable nappies. While promoting their use is good, because these can break down in commercial compost and do not need to go to landfill, it is not the best outcome with respect to reducing waste and resource consumption. Unlike the old style terry towelling nappy, modern cloth nappies do not need to be soaked with bleaches. Instead, these only need a gentle wash with a natural detergent.

Try before you buy – the cloth nappy library trial

In 2013 KESAB *environmental solutions* received funding from Zero Waste SA to provide a Cloth Nappy Library service to South Australians.

Council kerbside bin audits completed by KESAB show that on average, a kerbside waste bin contains six to seven percent of disposable nappies by weight.

KESAB partnered with local business Eco Bums to provide the cloth nappy library with demonstrations to alleviate confusion in the community about cloth nappies, the washing process, styles and the associated costs.

The demonstrations were an integral part of uptake, of the use of the library, giving parents who are open to using cloth nappies a chance to ask questions and clarify issues. As part of the trial, KESAB worked with local councils, the Women's and Children's Hospital, and child care centres.

The trial ran for 16 months and 318 families from more than 30 local authorities, including 11 rural councils, hired the kits. Some councils also provided support to promote the hire kits and demonstration sessions.

Cloth nappy hire kits with a range of cloth nappy styles were offered to families to hire at a subsidised cost of \$20 for two weeks.

The Cloth Nappy Library lowers the barriers to uptake of cloth nappies, as parents will be able to try different brands and styles before they invest their money and decide whether it is right for them.

Purchase cost is about \$600 and this may be in a couple of instalments buying different sizes) – people don't need to find \$1000 up front.

Survey results

Survey results from 148 respondents revealed that their cloth nappy use diverted a combined total of 65 tonnes of disposable nappies from landfill over a year.

- 73% of survey respondents participating in the trial used a total of 594 cloth nappies per day, thereby displacing the equivalent number of disposable nappies.
- This equates to 65 tonnes of disposable nappies prevented from ending up in landfill over a year².
- 82% of survey participants said that the Cloth Nappy Library helped them choose a style and a brand that worked for them.
- The majority of participants said that their main reason for using cloth nappies was a combination of financial, environmental and health benefits; 35% indicated it was for environmental reasons.
- Once respondents trialed the use of cloth nappies, more than 70% went onto purchase and use them.



¹ <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:198972>

² Taking reported usage figures and multiplying by the average weight of a disposable nappy of 300 grams and extrapolating the data across 12 months, 94 nappies x 0.300g x 365 days = 65,043 kg/1000 = 65 tonnes



AUBREY'S STORY

I'm Aubrey, new mum to Kiara.

I love my modern cloth nappies (MCNs)! They're super cute and the easy snaps or Velcro make them a breeze to use.

Washing is really easy. The nappies get a rinse (no spin) first (after solids have been disposed in the toilet), then I just use washing liquid from the supermarket and set the machine on a long cycle for a warm wash. Then they hang out to dry, and the sun bleaches out any stains.



I spent approximately \$750 on MCNs and use them during the day. This initial cost did seem high at the time I bought them, but I'll make that money back in just over one year.

In the first nine months I saved over 1200 nappies from going to landfill, which is equivalent to more than \$500 in savings from not buying disposable nappies. Plus I'll still be using the MCNs for years to come so there's more savings to be made.

If I had trialled the nappy kit first, I might not have purchased so many MCNs in the first place (some I bought I don't like to use) and that would've meant the nappies would've paid for themselves in under one year.

Another bonus is that I never have to worry about running out of nappies - I just go to the clothes line and there they are. The other big drawcard for me is the variety of colors, patterns and styles available. This makes MCNs super cute so much better than seeing a comparatively plain disposable. They also don't sag like many disposables, so I guess you could say there's a fashion element to it too.

Updated March 2015

About Zero Waste SA

The goal of Zero Waste SA is to eliminate waste or its disposal by encouraging South Australians to:

- Reduce their consumption of wasteful resources
- Reuse and recycle materials.

www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au

About KESAB environmental solutions

KESAB's mission is to inspire the South Australian community to restore, preserve and improve our environment through active participation in dynamic programs.

www.kesab.asn.au



Government of South Australia
Zero Waste SA

AVOID • REDUCE • REUSE • RECYCLE